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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

(for the period from 18 July 2000 to 18 January 2001)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1310 (2000) of 27 July 2000, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 January 2001. On 31 October 2000, I submitted an interim report (S/2000/1049) as requested in resolution 1310 (2000). Matters covered in that report are not repeated here, except as necessary.

II. Situation in the area of operation

2. The situation in UNIFIL's area of operation remained generally stable throughout the reporting period, although there were numerous minor violations of the Line of Withdrawal, the so-called "Blue Line". Such violations were largely the result of Israeli construction work on a technical fence along the line and of crossings by Lebanese shepherds and sometimes vehicles in places where the Israeli fence is some distance from the line. There were, however, occasional incidents at certain sensitive locations and five serious breaches of the line (see para. 4 below).

3. As reported in October, the main points of friction were at Sheikh Abbad Hill east of Hula and at the Fatima gate west of Metulla. Demonstrators on the Lebanese side gathered frequently at those locations and threw stones and other objects at Israeli personnel across the line, in some cases causing injuries. This activity declined somewhat during the holy month of Ramadan. In some cases, the demonstrators provoked Israeli firing, as on 28 December at Sheikh Abbad Hill, when Israeli soldiers fired in response to the throwing of what turned out to be firecrackers and the pointing of a toy pistol, injuring five Lebanese. The demonstrators dispersed but returned after a while; one of them made to throw a hand grenade but was restrained by others. On 30 December, a Lebanese man was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers when he attempted to breach the technical fence at Fatima gate. On the following day, shots fired from the Lebanese side south-east of Ayta ash Sha'b seriously wounded an Israeli civilian.

4. Five serious breaches of the Blue Line occurred in the so-called "Shab'a farms" area, in the foothills of Jabal ash-Sheikh (Mount Hermon) south-east of Kafr Shuba. In addition to the attacks on 7 and 20 October, which I detailed in my interim report, Hizbollah launched two attacks across the Blue Line at Israeli targets in that area. On 16 November, Hizbollah detonated several roadside bombs in an attack on an Israel Defence Forces convoy, injuring two Israeli soldiers. On 26 November, another roadside bomb killed an Israeli soldier and injured two others. In retaliation, the Israel Defence Forces fired artillery and dropped two bombs north of the Blue Line. On 3 January, an unidentified group fired 35 mortar rounds from south of Kafr Shuba at an Israeli position across the line. The Israeli forces responded with artillery and small-arms fire. Israeli violations of Lebanese air space, which had resumed after Hizbollah's attack on 7 October, continued on an almost daily basis.

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5. Last May, when the United Nations identified the Blue Line for the purpose of confirming the Israeli withdrawal, the Shab'a farms area was left outside the Blue Line on grounds that are described in detail in the Secretary-General's report of 22 May 2000 (S/2000/460, paras. 11-19). Subsequently, the Governments of Israel and Lebanon, notwithstanding certain reservations, confirmed that they would respect the line as identified by the United Nations. In resolution 1310 (2000), the Security Council called on the parties to respect that line. Since last November, the Government of Lebanon has asserted that the Blue Line is not valid in the Shab'a farms area and has claimed the right to use every means, including force, against the Israeli forces occupying it.

6. The overall security situation in UNIFIL's area of operation has remained good and shown further improvement since October. Residents who were away during the Israeli occupation continued to return. In addition, former members of the former de facto forces and their families, about 1,600 in all, have returned to Lebanon.

7. The Lebanese authorities continued to control the area through the civil administration, police, and the Joint Security Force, composed of Internal Security Forces and Lebanese army, that deployed last August. The reintegration of communications, infrastructure, health and welfare systems with the rest of the country made further progress, albeit at a slow pace. As before, however, the Lebanese army and security forces did not operate close to the Blue Line, where control was left to Hizbollah, which also provides some social, medical and education services to some villages. Hizbollah patrols were little in evidence during Ramadan but increased at the end of December. They were usually unarmed. On occasion, Hizbollah members interfered with UNIFIL's freedom of movement.

8. UNIFIL maintained close liaison with the Lebanese and Israeli authorities. It acted to minimize friction between the parties and, through its network of observation posts and regular ground and air patrols, UNIFIL monitored the situation along the Blue Line, observing and reporting. All violations were taken up with the party concerned and most of them were easily corrected.

9. UNIFIL continued to assist the civilian population in the form of medical care, water projects, equipment or services for schools and orphanages, supplies of social services to the needy and finding potential donors for such projects. This assistance was provided from resources made available by troop-contributing countries. UNIFIL's medical centres and mobile teams provided medical care to an average of 1,500 civilian patients per month. A field dental programme treated approximately 150 cases per month. Veterinary assistance has been extended to some villages within UNIFIL's area of operation. UNIFIL cooperated closely on humanitarian matters with the Lebanese authorities, United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other organizations and agencies operating in Lebanon.

10. The large number of mines and unexploded ordnance remained a matter of concern. Since last July, a total of 5 persons died and 26 were injured as a result of exploding mines and ordnance. The data collected by UNIFIL so far suggest a high level of mine saturation affecting the whole area formerly controlled by Israel. Clearing them will require a concerted effort, including foreign assistance. The Government of Lebanon has taken the lead in organizing this effort, to which the United Nations is lending its support. Since last July, UNIFIL has demolished more than 2,000 mines and rounds of unexploded ordnance.

11. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) continued its support to the Lebanese Council for Development and Reconstruction for a programme of socio-economic rehabilitation and development in southern Lebanon. The programme provides a platform for action at the community level and is focused on the local civil society and private sectors. The Government of Lebanon and UNDP have each provided an initial amount of $1 million. UNDP has opened an office in Tyre from which the programme is managed.

III. Organizational matters

12. Over the last six months, UNIFIL underwent an augmentation and carried out a major redeployment. An engineer battalion from Ukraine of 646 all ranks arrived on 20 July 2000. The small mine-clearance unit from Sweden temporarily strengthened the mine-clearing capacity in connection with the redeployment. Finland provided the full complement of 64 armoured personnel carriers, and Italy 2 additional helicopters. A map showing the current deployment of UNIFIL is attached.

13. As of 30 December 2000, UNIFIL comprised 5,800 troops, from Fiji (594), Finland (645), France (254), Ghana (787), India (791), Ireland (609), Italy (68), Nepal (723), Poland (633) and Ukraine (650). The Swedish component (45) left on 27 December, as planned. UNIFIL was assisted in its tasks by 51 military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). In addition, UNIFIL employed 480 civilian staff, of whom 130 were recruited internationally and 350 locally. Major General Seth Kofi Obeng continued as Force Commander.

14. I regret to report the death of a Nepalese member of the Force who was killed in a traffic accident. Since the establishment of UNIFIL 235 members of the Force have lost their lives; 78 as a result of firings or bomb explosions, 99 as a result of accidents and 58 from other causes. Firing or mine or bomb explosions wounded a total of 344.

15. Mr. Rolf Knutsson completed his assignment as the Secretary-General's Personal Representative in mid-December. Mr. Staffan de Mistura succeeded him on 15 January 2001.

IV. Financial matters

16. The General Assembly, in its resolution 55/180 of 19 December 2000, appropriated the amount of $86.8 million gross for the expansion of the Force for the period from 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2001, in addition to the amount of $146.8 million gross appropriated by the Assembly in its resolution 54/267 of 15 June 2000. Should the Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force at its current level, the cost of maintaining the Force will be limited to the total monthly rate of $19.5 million gross approved under Assembly resolutions 54/267 and 55/180. However, should the Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force at a reduced level, the cost of maintaining the Force will be adjusted downward accordingly.

17. As at 31 December 2000, unpaid assessments to the Special Account for UNIFIL for the period since its inception from 19 March 1978 amounted to $126.1 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations amounted to $1,989.4 million.

V. Observations

18. The general situation in south Lebanon has remained calm and orderly. Most of the violations of the Blue Line were minor and quickly corrected once UNIFIL raised them with the party concerned. Nevertheless, reckless behaviour of Lebanese demonstrators on the Blue Line continued, drawing at times an overly harsh response from the Israeli soldiers on the other side and leading to casualties that could and should have been avoided. The greatest cause of concern, however, were the attacks across the Blue Line in the Shab'a farms area, which were deliberate acts in direct breach of the decisions of the Security Council.

19. The simplest and most direct way to ensure calm in the area is for the parties to act in accordance with the decisions of the Security Council, respect the Blue Line in all its parts, as called for by the Security Council, and cooperate effectively with UNIFIL. This implies that the Government of Lebanon asserts its effective authority and maintains law and order throughout its territory up to the line identified by the United Nations. That is its right and duty, consistently upheld by the Security Council and paid for with the lives of United Nations soldiers. I hope very much that the Government of Lebanon will reconsider the position described in paragraphs 5 and 6 above in the light of its commitments and of the decisions of the Security Council.

20. Because of the high tension in Arab-Israeli relations, I did not consider it prudent last October to submit suggestions for the reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in south Lebanon, as I had intended and as the Security Council had requested in resolution 1310 (2000). Although the situation in the region has remained tense, I believe I should now convey my thoughts on this subject to the Security Council for its consideration.

21. Of the three parts of its mandate, UNIFIL has essentially completed two. It has confirmed the withdrawal of Israeli forces and assisted, to the extent it could, the Lebanese authorities as they returned to the area vacated by Israel. UNIFIL functions in close cooperation with those authorities and no longer exercises any control over the area of operation. UNIFIL cannot, of course, compel the Lebanese Government to take the last step and deploy its personnel down to the Blue Line.

22. UNIFIL now focuses on the remaining part of its mandate, the restoration of international peace and security. Pending a comprehensive peace, UNIFIL seeks at least to maintain the ceasefire along the Blue Line through patrols and observation from fixed positions and close contact with the parties, with a view to correcting violations and preventing the escalation of incidents. It would appear that the need for the United Nations to perform such functions will continue to exist in the foreseeable future.

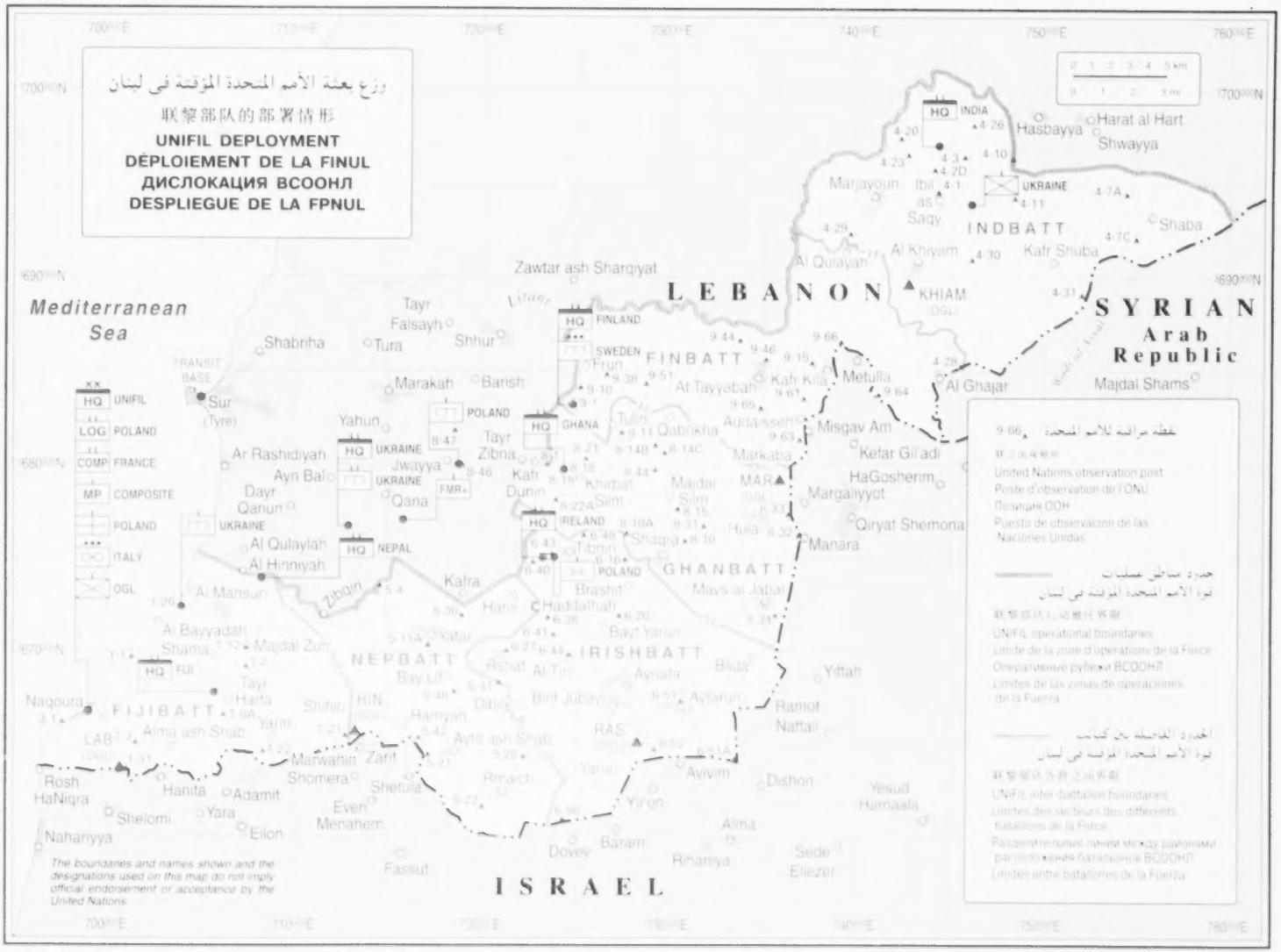
23. The functions described above are those of an observer mission, and I have taken good note of the Security Council's reference, in resolution 1310 (2000), to UNTSO. However, in view of the conditions in the region, I would be reluctant to entrust the task to unarmed observers alone, and would recommend instead a combination of armed infantry and unarmed observers. I would suggest two infantry battalions, a group of UNTSO observers, as at present, and support.

24. In view of the situation in the region, a prudent approach is appropriate. Should the Security Council opt for the suggested configuration, it may therefore consider proceeding in stages. A possible first stage might be to return UNIFIL to the strength it had before the augmentation last year, that is, to about 4,500 all ranks.

25. In a letter dated 5 January 2001 addressed to me (S/2001/14), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations conveyed his Government's request that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of six months. In the light of the conditions prevailing in the area, I support the extension and recommend that the Security Council extend UNIFIL's mandate until 31 July 2001.

26. In making this recommendation, I must again draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to $126.1 million. This represents money owed to the Member States contributing the troops that make up the Force. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full and to clear all remaining arrears. I should like to express my gratitude to the Governments contributing troops to the Force for their understanding and patience.

27. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to Terje Roed-Larsen, my Special Envoy, and Rolf Knutsson, my Personal Representative, for their tireless efforts. I wish also to pay a tribute to Major General Seth Kofi Obeng and the men and women under his command for the manner in which they have carried out their task. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves and the United Nations.



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